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RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0757
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2640
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RULSAAV/NAVMEDRSCHCEN SILVER SPRING MD
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 000860

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SUBJECT: NAMRU ISSUE MIREN IN POLITICAL AMBITIONS

REF: A. JAKARTA 804

- [1](#)B. JAKARTA 673
- [1](#)C. JAKARTA 575 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The basis of Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari's vitriolic public attacks against the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit in Jakarta (NAMRU-2) is her desire to make it a populist/vote-getting issue in the run-up to the 2009 national elections. Our failure to respond to Indonesia's draft MOU on NAMRU's continued presence here gives her an open field to make mischief.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY (Con'd): Given rising discontent with the nation's broken health care system, NAMRU-2 is the one populist issue the grandiose minister can use to burnish her weak credentials. Now that recent Mission outreach has begun to set the record straight regarding Supari's allegations, we would be best served to sit this one out in the public arena while pursuing private diplomacy to educate policy-makers who can be influential on the issue. We also need to continue to try to keep NAMRU's future separate from the sample sharing issue, resisting the Health Minister's efforts to conflate the two. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (C) In the run-up to the 2009 elections, Health Minister Supari has latched onto the presence of NAMRU-2 in Indonesia to appeal to nationalist and populist sentiment. Supari was nominated for her current post by Syafi'i Maarif, former chairman of Indonesia's second-largest Islamic organization Muhammadiyah. She also is close to Maarif's predecessor at Muhammadiyah, populist politician Amien Rais, a distant relative. Now chair of the small Islamic National Mandate Party (PAN), Rais is a leading critic of foreign direct investment. Supari's views on sample sharing and NAMRU are possibly inspired by Rais' platform of criticizing foreign economic interests, according to Endy Bayuni, Jakarta Post chief editor and an insightful political analyst.

BROKEN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

[1](#)4. (C) A Muhammadiyah insider, Piet Khaidir, posited that

Supari has honed in on NAMRU-2 to promote her own political ambitions. She wants to remain health minister after the 2009 elections. Other sources have told us that she has vice presidential aspirations. While NAMRU-2 is not a major popular issue in and of itself, her success in linking it to her ongoing campaign on sample sharing has increased public interest in NAMRU-2. In addition, Supari's poor handling of Indonesia's broken health system and skyrocketing health care costs are huge potential liabilities to her, making NAMRU-2 a useful diversion, Khaidir told DepPol/C. Supari discovered that issues related to divesting foreigners of Indonesian assets are "very sexy," Khaidir said.

15. (C) Before her appointment as minister, Supari was a cardiologist. According to another Muhammadiyah source, Raja Juli Antoni, her strong nationalistic views were not known until after she became minister in 2004, adding that because she never lived abroad, Supari is very parochial. However, Supari does have a strong mind of her own, Antoni told us. In her recently released book, "It's Time for the World to Change: Divine Hand Behind Avian Influenza," Supari describes Indonesia's inability to acquire Tamiflu in 2005 as a "deep wound in my heart" (ref C). She writes that rich countries intend to profit from epidemics in poor countries like Indonesia. Born in the traditional Central Java city of Solo and schooled entirely in Indonesia, Supari writes fondly of Sukarno as a leader "who made western countries afraid of him," the same colonialists who "baby-fed" Indonesia through charity. She also refers frequently to her Islamic faith and her role as a champion of the poor.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES THRIVE

16. (C) The controversy over NAMRU-2 as a nationalist issue

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has simmered for a decade. One new element is that Supari has been able to unite this traditional nationalist/xenophobic sentiment here with part of the Islamic community. A society which thrives on rumors and takes conspiracy theories at face value, Indonesia has long accepted western conspiracy theories as fact. The same type of paranoid Indonesian civil servants and pundits who claim that NAMRU-2 is carrying out top secret weapons research (just as Supari claims Los Alamos is doing with Indonesian a.i. samples) also believe the U.S. is plotting to divide and conquer Indonesia by promoting separatism. Ultra-nationalists have even linked NAMRU-2 with designs to support Papuan independence, telling the media that NAMRU-2 is connected to tension in that province through its research in Papua. (Note: In approximately 1995, a NAMRU request to build a small airstrip in Papua--then Irian Jaya--to support a malaria study there, was viewed by TNI as evidence of U.S. meddling in Papua.).

17. (C) On April 23, two radical Muslim organizations, Mer-C and An-Nashir Institute, jumped on the bandwagon with a press conference, a gambit to bolster prospects for conservative Muslim parties in the next elections. On April 25, Supari appeared at another joint press conference with these same organizations. Muhammadiyah sources told us that Supari's joining forces with these extremist organizations has nothing to do with Muhammadiyah or her own religious views. Rather, both Supari and these organizations are appealing to the same Islamic nationalist base which has a small but important following in Indonesia.

18. (C) Supari's worldview has enough resonance in Indonesia that mainstream politicians and pundits are publicly walking gingerly around the issue. President Yudhoyono wrote an introduction to Supari's book reportedly without knowing that it contained farfetched theories about bio-weapons production. (Note: Others say that Supari also is close to the First Lady.) Yudhoyono's key foreign affairs adviser, Dino Djala, has been criticized by Yudhoyono's enemies for supporting NAMRU-2. The defense minister has raised security

concerns and the foreign minister diplomatic immunity issues about NAMRU-2, without taking a strong stand on NAMRU'S future. Several members of Parliament have seized on the issue for their own political purposes, calling for NAMRU-2 to be closed.

MEDIA COVERAGE CORRECTS THE STORY

¶9. (C) Given Supardi's passion for this issue and the hesitation of policymakers to undercut her, it is unclear when her diatribe will relent. However, the U.S. Mission took the offensive against misinformation about NAMRU-2 with a press conference held by the Ambassador and NAMRU Director on April 24. This resulted in extensive media coverage affirming that NAMRU-2 is conducting legitimate research on naturally occurring tropical diseases in transparent, collaborative and mutually beneficial fashion. Nearly 30 journalists toured NAMRU on April 25. During these tours and others by Indonesian officials, visitors have been allowed to open every door and talk to all Indonesian staff. During her April 18 unannounced visit to NAMRU-2, Minister Supari was pleasant and surprised that there were so many Indonesians there, although she never acknowledged this fact in her critical comments later to the media.

¶10. (C) The current media coverage has allowed the Mission to begin to set the public record straight. Meanwhile, Yudhoyono's office has been supportive of NAMRU despite negative statements by Cabinet officials. While some skeptics will never believe the true story, attention should now turn from public diplomacy to efforts to educate influential Indonesians individually, such as members of Parliament, officials and civil society. The best hope to keep NAMRU-2 in Indonesia is to convince key policymakers of its continued usefulness to both countries. The critical next step is the resumption of negotiations over NAMRU's MOU

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with the GOI, for which we urgently need instructions.
HUME